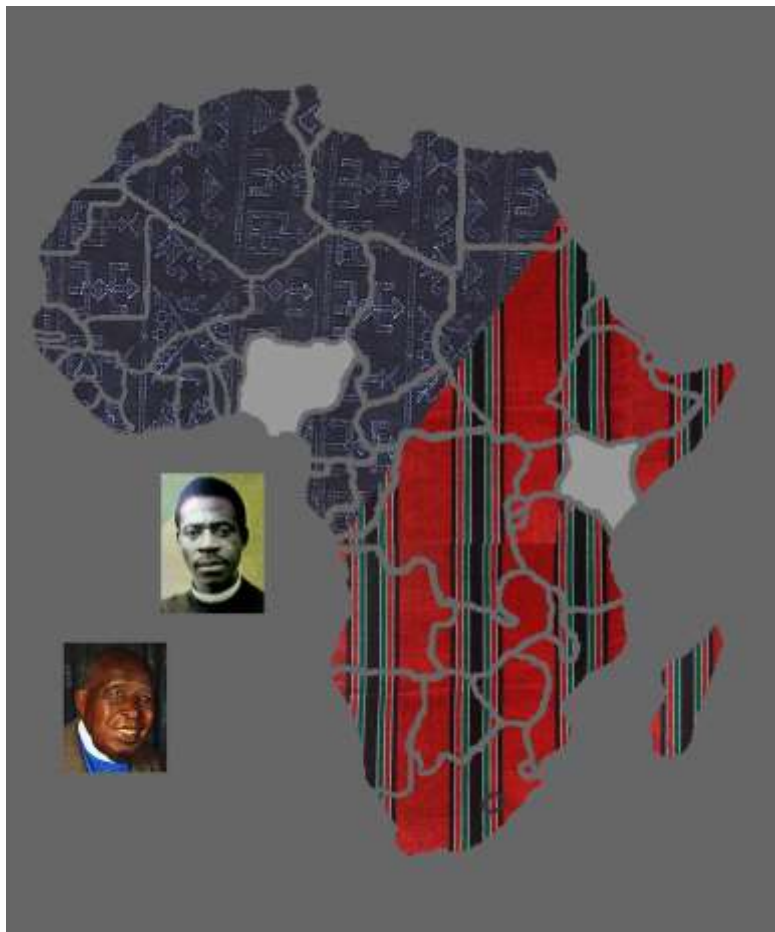


Journal of African Christian Biography

Vol. 2, No. 2 (April 2017)

Focus:
Aladura Trailblazers (Nigeria)
Gatu and Moratorium (Kenya)



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The *Journal of African Christian Biography* was launched in 2016 to complement and make stories from the on-line *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (www.DACB.org) more readily accessible and immediately useful in African congregations and classrooms.

Now published quarterly, with all issues available on line, the intent of the *JACB* is to promote the research, publication, and use of African Christian biography within Africa by serving as an academically credible but publicly accessible source of information on Christianity across the continent. Content will always include biographies already available in the database itself, but original contributions related to African Christian biography or to African church history are also welcome. While the policy of the *DACB* itself has been to restrict biographical content to subjects who are deceased, the *JACB* plans to include interviews with select living African church leaders and academics.

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[Pictured on the cover graphic are Joseph Babalola and John Gatu.]

**Moses Orimolade Tunolase, Joseph Ayodele Babalola, Josiah
Olunowo Oshitelu, and Samuel Bilewu Joseph Oschoffa:
Four Trailblazers of the *Aladura* Movement in Nigeria**

Scholars of African Christianity now recognize the enormous contributions African prophet-evangelists have made to the contextualization of the Christian faith and to the expansion of vast churches across Africa in the last one hundred years. The churches that grew out of the ministries of these indigenous avant-garde prophets are African Independent/Initiated/Instituted, or Indigenous Churches. Peter Falk notes their undeniable influence in African Christianity:

The African Independent Churches constitute a significant portion of Christianity in Africa and a unique spirit in African Christianity. The development of Independent Churches has attained a dimension unprecedented in the history of the Christian church. These independent church movements have been founded by a separation from parent churches, missions, or independent churches – in a few cases, under the initiative of a dynamic leader ... Such ministries may be found in many countries of Africa, especially south of the Sahara; these ministries have a large influence on the population.¹

Afe Adogame and Lizo Jafta confirm Falk's views by stating: "these independent and/or indigenous churches often designated by the acronym AICs, represent one of the most profound developments in the transmission and transformation of both African Christianity and Christianity in Africa."²

In Nigeria, starting in the early twentieth century, indigenous prophets and prophetic prayer groups contributed to the growth of AICs. Indigenous evangelists, confident in their divine calling, traveled from place to place, preaching the gospel. Although they did not intend to start new churches, their ministry invariably led to the creation of churches that are still vibrant today.

Scholars generally identify Garrick Sokari Braide as the precursor of indigenous Christianity in Nigeria. In 1912, Braide started a powerful mass movement that attracted scores of converts. He was a powerful healer, made accurate prophetic predictions, and displayed numerous charismatic gifts. However, he clashed with the ecclesiastical and colonial authorities, who arrested and imprisoned him on frivolous charges. He was finally released in

¹Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa* (Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks, 1997), 452.

²Afe Adogame & Lizo Jafta, "Zionists, *Aladura* and Roho: African Instituted Churches," in Ogbu U Kalu (ed.) *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton: African World Press, 2007), 270.

1918 but died shortly thereafter in November of that year. After his death, his followers inaugurated the Christ Army Church.

The next vibrant phenomenon in Nigerian Christian history, and the subject of this issue, was the *Aladura* movement of southwestern Nigeria. There, the ministries of itinerant evangelists led to the founding of indigenous churches that became known as *Aladura* Churches. The most important of these churches are: the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (C&S) founded by Moses Orimolade Tunolase; Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) of Joseph Ayodele Babalola; the Church of the Lord (*Aladura*) Worldwide (CLAW) of Josiah Olunowo Oshitelu; and the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) founded by Samuel Bilewu Joseph Oschoffa. Part 1 of this issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* will focus on their lives and ministries.

Aladura Churches have risen from a position of obscurity to one of prominence within contemporary Christianity. Their initial struggles powerfully reveal the ways they faced opposition with determination and perseverance. Sadly, the erroneous view of certain western scholars contributed to their struggles. Emil Ludwig, for example, did not believe that Africans had the concept of Deity/God. According to Ludwig, Africans were untutored savages and sub-humans with little or no intelligence, who could not conceive of the idea of God. Because of such misguided understandings, the rise of these prophets was derided by western churches and colonial authorities alike. They persecuted the *Aladura* pioneers and leveled serious, though unfounded, allegations against them. Babalola spent six months in jail. Undeterred, these African prophets refused to quit and today their churches testify to the resilience of their message.

Aladura Christians teach us about the life of prayer. They are a people “addicted” to prayer. *Aladura* is a Yoruba word meaning “the owners of prayer” or “the praying people.” Prayer is a major preoccupation of the *Aladura* who pray many times a day, sometimes at specific hours of the day. The Precious Stone Society, founded in 1918, is considered the first *Aladura* movement. Out of this movement emerged the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). At the time, the fervent prayers of Precious Stone Society members prevailed over a serious situation – the bubonic plague. Later, CAC founder Joseph Ayodele Babalola was credited with raising a dead child to life through prayer. This singular act triggered the *Aladura* Revival of the 1930s, which is still unparalleled in the history of Christianity in Nigeria.

The *Aladura* believe that God manifests his power through miracles. To the *Aladura*, it is God’s prerogative to suspend the laws of nature, at any time, to make things happen that are beyond human comprehension. Supernatural acts and works of power have characterized the ministries of virtually all the *Aladura* prophets. The *Aladura* do not believe that God has withdrawn from the world, but instead that he is always active in its affairs.

Evangelism is another lesson to learn from the *Aladura* experience. Individuals and churches take the Great Commission very seriously. Most of

their prophets were itinerant evangelists. They traveled around preaching the gospel and organizing revivals even in the remotest villages, taking their message to the people instead of waiting for them to come to church. Even today, one can see *Aladura* prophets, bells in hand, preaching the gospel in major cities in Nigeria.

Why do these churches attract so many members? Essentially, they have been able to contextualize Christianity and make faith relevant to the African milieu. If Christianity is to survive in Africa, it must be relevant to the cultural context of the people. From the beginning, Africans and western missionaries have clashed over the process of incarnating Christian practices into local culture. But recovering a true sense of the mission of the church in Africa means recognizing the African factor. The *Aladura* churches have played a pioneering role in this area by modeling a faith that is truly Christian and truly African.

Aladura Christianity in Nigeria is highly appealing to the common people because it creates down-to-earth, grass roots faith communities where everyone feels a sense of belonging. Africans expect God to manifest himself through works of power and to address life's existential problems. They consider that worship flows from humans to the Divine and that humans, in return, receive certain benefits from the Divine. *Aladura* Christianity makes this relationship possible, thus attracting the downtrodden masses who are the most frequent victims of the unscrupulous practices of African political leaders.

Today, many *Aladura* practices previously condemned by other denominations, such as loud spontaneous prayer, are now regular features of worship in many other Christian churches in Nigeria. *Aladura* Christianity has come to stay in Nigeria and is expanding its influence on a daily basis. However, this brand of Christianity is not without its challenges—challenges such as rampant schisms in the churches and syncretism—the idea of mixing elements from traditional worship and extra-biblical practices with Christianity.

Nevertheless, there are many lessons to learn from the following biographies that showcase the life and ministries of the early *Aladura* prophets—Orimolade, Babalola, Oshitelu, and Oschoffa—both from the privations they suffered at the hands of the powers that be and from their eventual triumph as leaders of some of the largest and most dynamic churches in the world.

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Moses Orimolade Tunolase
1879 to 1933
Cherubim and Seraphim Movement
Nigeria

“*Baba Aladura*” Orimolade is the acclaimed father of African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria for good reason. He was the one of the first *Aladura* prophets to introduce faith healing into Christianity in Nigeria. He is a *primus inter pares* in the list of the earliest itinerant prophets to institute the *Aladura* spiritual phenomena of clairvoyance and clairaudience. [1] His attributes as a man of faith, a charismatic leader, a genius, a “mysterious and a truly humble man of God,” are glowingly highlighted by Omoyajowo. [2] He is affectionately called “Saint Orimolade” by the members of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society.

The Mystery Surrounding His Birth

Orimolade came from the royal lineage of *Omo’ba Ode Sodi* of Okoron Quarters, Ikare, in southwestern Nigeria. The year of his birth is traditionally given as 1879. [3] Many mysterious occurrences were said to have characterized his birth and life. He was reported to have spoken to his mother while he was in the womb. Orimolade was also reported to have attempted to walk on the day he was born but his father prevented this using the powers of incantation. The result was that Orimolade became crippled and was not able to walk when it was time for him to do so. [4] These well-publicized mysteries definitely marked him out as an unusual personality, which he eventually grew up to be. In due time, Orimolade became a minister of the Gospel.

His Call

Before the start of his ministry, Orimolade was said to have received what could be termed divine visitations through a vision and a dream. In the vision, he was directed to take some water from a flowing stream and to use it to wash his legs. He complied and partially regained the use of his legs, though he still limped for the rest of his life. [5] In the dream, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and gave him three objects: a rod, a royal insignia, and a crown. The rod signified his victory. The insignia implied “the unction to make divine utterances, while the crown indicated that he has been endowed with honor and multi-respect which would make people bow before him to receive blessing.” [6] Soon after these revelations, Orimolade became an itinerant evangelist, preaching the gospel across major cities in Nigeria.

His Evangelistic Journeys as a Freelance Prophet

Orimolade was originally an itinerant prophet. Like William Harris and Garrick Braide he never had the intention of establishing a church, so he continued in his itinerant ministry. Between 1916 and 1924 he toured many parts of Yorubaland, the Niger Delta, and the northern area. Wherever he went, there was usually a manifestation of signs and wonders. In Ilorin, a Moslem dominated town, he was said to have had a very successful ministry and performed many miracles. At Kabba, he reportedly killed a lion, brought a dead young woman back to life at Alhjiru-Yisa, a Moslem dominated village, and won many converts at Ikirun where he was instrumental in the healing of a number of sick people through his powerful prayer. [7] Next, he visited Ibadan, where his fame increased as he held “revival” prayer meetings in churches wherever he could be accommodated. Finally, he came to Lagos and was for a period the host of Rev. T. A. J. Ogunbiyi of the Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Ebute-Ero, Lagos. Here his fame increased because his ministrations were also accompanied by signs and wonders as in other places.

Though unlearned, the proficiency with which he recited the Bible was astounding. In spite of this and the miracles, Orimolade’s *modus operandi* of performing miracles was challenged as incompatible with that of the Anglican Church and so he was compelled to move out from there. [9]

The Founding of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement

An incident brought Orimolade in contact with a young lady, Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon, and the two became the principal actors in the establishment and shaping of the destiny of the movement later known as the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church. [10] There are various versions of how Orimolade came into contact with Abiodun. The most prominent however is that she had a strange visionary experience after attending a Roman Catholic festival, which landed her in a trance for many days. Many people, including the vicar of her church, were invited to restore her to normalcy, but she was only able to recover when Orimolade was called in to pray for her.

Her experience and recovery were viewed by many as supernatural events and resulted in many converging on the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Hunny Moiety, of whom Abiodun was a ward, in order to have a feel of the miraculous act. The Moieties who were discomfited by the sight of the huge crowd that had besieged their apartment since the incident began, pleaded with Orimolade to take the young lady away to his place. Orimolade consented, and consequently, inquisitive visitors started converging in Orimolade’s residence to listen to Abiodun’s story. A prayer fellowship was formed, which eventually blossomed into the C&S Society in 1925.

Unity in Diversity in the C&S Movements

The C&S grew quickly in its formative years but has suffered so many schisms that today the Church has hundreds of splinter groups within the movement. The schism started between the two co-founders, Orimolade and Christianah Abiodun, who parted ways in 1929. It is evident that Orimolade made concerted efforts to re-unite the dissenting groups but all his moves for peace were frustrated. In spite of this division, it is claimed that since his death on October 19, 1933, members from various sects, as well as people from all walks of life, from different religions and continents, go on pilgrimage to Orimolade's burial site to venerate and offer prayers. Thus, in a way, the pilgrims demonstrate the universal nature of the society.

Michael Ogunewu and Deji Ayegboyin

Notes:

1. Akin Omoyajowo, "Moses Orimolade Tunolase" in J. A. Omoyajowo (ed.), *Makers of the Church in Nigeria 1842-1947* (Lagos: CSS Bookshops Ltd (Publishing Units) 1995).
2. Akin Omoyajowo, "Moses Orimolade Tunolase."
3. Akin Omoyajowo, "Moses Orimolade Tunolase," 118.
4. Michael A. Ogunewu, *Travails and Triumphs of Aladura Christianity in Nigeria* (Ikeja: The Amen Mission Inc., 2015), 27.
5. Ibid, 27.
6. G. A. Oshitelu, *History of the Aladura (Independent) Churches 1918-1940* (Ibadan: Hope Publication Ltd, 2007), 48.
7. Ibid, 50.
8. J. A. Omoyajowo, *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1982), 39.
9. E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria* (London, Longmans, 1966), 276.
10. Deji Ayegboyin and S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches* (Lagos: Greater Heights Publications, 1997), 82.

Babalola, Joseph Ayodele
1904 to 1959
Christ Apostolic Church ([Aladura](#))
Nigeria

Joseph Ayodele Babalola was born on April 25, 1904 to David Rotimi and Madam Marta Talabi who belonged to the Anglican Church. The family lived at Odo-Owa in Ilofa, a small town about ninety kilometers from Ilorin in Kwara State. His father was the *Baba Ijo* (“church father”) of the C.M.S. Church at Odo-Owa. Mysterious circumstances allegedly surrounded the birth of Babalola. On that day, it was believed that a strange and mighty object exploded and shook the clouds.

Babalola started school at Ilofa and got as far as standard five at All Saints' School, Osogbo. However, he quit school to become a motor mechanic apprentice before joining the Public Works Department. He helped construct the road from Igbara-Oke to Ilesa, working as a steamroller driver.

Babalola's Call to the Prophetic Ministry

Just like the Old Testament prophets, Babalola was called by God into the prophetic office. His strange experience started on the night of September 25, 1928 when he suddenly became restless and could not sleep. The climax came one day when he was working on the Ilesa-Igbara-Oke road. Suddenly the steamroller’s engine stopped, to his utter amazement. He was in this state of confusion when a great voice “like the sound of many waters” called him three times. The voice told him that he would die if he refused to heed the divine call to go into the world and preach. Babalola did not want to listen to this voice, like many of the biblical prophets, so he gave in only after he had received the assurance of divine guidance. He resigned his appointment with the Public Works Department.

The same voice came to Babalola a second time asking him to fast for seven days. He obeyed, and at the end of the seven days, he saw a great figure of a man in a dazzling robe who resembled Jesus. The man spoke at length about the mission he was to embark upon. The man also told him of the persecutions he would face and assured him of God's protection and victory. Babalola received a prayer hand bell as a symbol. He was told that the sound of the bell would always drive away evil spirits. He also received a bottle of “life-giving water” to heal all manner of sicknesses. Consequently, wherever and whenever he prayed into water for therapeutic purposes, effective healing was procured for those who drank the water. Thus, Babalola became a prophet and a man with extraordinary powers.

The Itinerary of Prophet Babalola

During one of his prayer sessions an angel appeared to him and gave him a

big yam that he then ordered him to eat. The angel told him that the yam was the tuber with which God fed the whole world. He further revealed that God had granted him the power to deliver those who were possessed of evil spirits in the world. He was directed to go first to Odo-Owa and start preaching. He was to arrive in the town on a market day, cover his body with palm fronds and disfigure himself with charcoal paints.

In October 1928, he entered the town in the manner described and was taken for a mad man. He immediately started preaching and prophesying, warning the people of an impending danger if they did not repent. He was arrested and taken to the district officer at Ilorin for allegedly disturbing the peace but was later released. However, it was said that a few days later, there was an outbreak of smallpox in the town. The people then quickly sought out the man whose prophecies and messages were once rejected. He went around praying for the victims, and they were all healed.

Babalola organized regular prayer meetings in a C.M.S. church in Odo-Owa that many people attended. Information reached the bishop that the parishioners were seeing visions, speaking in tongues, and praying vigorously. Babalola and the visionaries were allegedly ordered by Bishop Smith to leave the church, but Babalola did not leave the town until June 1930.

While he was at Odo-Owa, a warrant for his arrest was issued from Ilorin. He was arrested for preaching against witches, a practice which had caused some trouble in Otuo in present Bendel State. He was sentenced to jail for six months in Benin City in March 1932. After serving the jail term, he went back to Efon Alaaye.

On an invitation from Daniel Ajibola of the Faith Tabernacle, Babalola went to Lagos, where all the leaders warmly received the young prophet into their midst. Babalola had not yet been baptized by immersion and Senior Pastor Esinsinade emphasized that he needed to go through that rite. Pastor Esinsinade baptized him in the lagoon at the back of the Faith Tabernacle Church building.

Oke-Oye Mighty Revival

In spite of all his success, Babalola's intention was not to start a new church. He persuaded his followers to become members of the Faith Tabernacle. To facilitate this, he went to Lagos to confer with the leaders, especially as he was not yet well acquainted with the doctrines, tenets, and administration of the church. A controversy among the leaders of the Faith Tabernacle in Nigeria (over some doctrines) prompted them to call a meeting to discuss the issues. Babalola was introduced to the whole conference. During the meeting, a mighty, sweeping revival broke out when Babalola raised a child from the dead.

The result was that thousands of people, including traditional religionists, Muslims, and Christians from various other denominations,

were converted to the Faith Tabernacle. Revival meetings were held in an open field to accommodate the numbers. Members from the Anglican and Wesleyan churches transferred their allegiance to the revivalist and all the patients in Wesley Hospital, Ilesa, abandoned their beds to seek healing from Babalola. Many of the schools belonging to the Wesleyan, Anglican, Baptist, and the Roman Catholic churches closed down altogether.

The tidal wave of Babalola's revival spread from Ilesa to Ibadan, Ijebu, Lagos, Efon-Alaaye, Aramoko Ekiti and Abeokuta. No greater revival preceded that of Babalola.

The Birth of the Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria

Babalola's spectacular evangelism brought with it a wave of persecution. The mission churches allegedly became jealous and hostile, especially as their members constituted the main converts of the Faith Tabernacle. The Nigerian government was alerted to the activities of the movement.

At this time, the leading members of the movement explored associations with Faith Tabernacle in the United States, Faith and Truth Temple of Toronto, Canada, and the British Apostolic Church, to which it was eventually ceded. Consequently, the name changed from Faith Tabernacle to the Apostolic Church.

Doctrinal differences between the two groups soon began to appear on issues of divine healing, and the movement subsequently split. One faction of the church made Oke-Oye its base and retained the name the Apostolic Church. The other larger faction in which Babalola was a leader eventually became the Christ Apostolic Church.

Today, the church is reputedly one of the most popular Christian organizations in Nigeria. The church opened up several primary and grammar schools, a teachers' training college, a seminary, maternity homes, and a training school for prophets. The years between 1970 and 1980 saw further expansion of the church to England, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

The C.A.C. believes that the spiritual power bestowed on Babalola placed him on an equal level with Biblical apostles like Peter, Paul, and others who were sent out with the authority of, and in the name of Jesus.

Joseph Ayo Babalola slept in the Lord in 1959.

David O. Olayiwola

This biography is abridged from an article written by Dr. David O. Olayiwola, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, as a chapter of the book *Makers of the Church in Nigeria*, edited by J. A. Omoyajowo (Lagos, Nigeria: CSS Bookshops Ltd., 1995), pages 137-149.

To read the full article please visit
www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/babalola2_joseph.html.

Josiah Olunowo Ositelu

1900 to 1966

The Church of the Lord (*Aladura*) Worldwide (TCLAW) Nigeria

Introduction

Primate Josiah Olunowo Ositelu (Psy.D) is the most prestigious and the first transnational head of an African Indigenous Church (AIC) in Nigeria. [1] His most popular portrait, which shows him dressed in the full regalia of a church primate, betrays his Anglican roots and his ambition to become head of an equivalent church—an aspiration that was fulfilled. Ositelu's TCLAW was officially inaugurated in his hometown of Ogere in southwestern Nigeria on July 27, 1930 [2], with ten members. It became one of the fastest growing AICs soon after its establishment. The Church rapidly started branches in towns in western, northern, and eastern Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, and the United Kingdom. [3]

His Birth and Spiritual Development

Josiah Ositelu was born in Ogere on May 15, 1900. [4] Like other legendary prophetic figures and religious leaders, countless mysteries were woven around his birth and ministry. It is claimed that when he was born his parents consulted diviners to ascertain the fate of their baby. The diviners assured the parents that the baby would not only live but would be an unusual child. It was furthermore predicted that he would be spiritually powerful, influential, and wise—a trailblazer and a guide of both Europeans and Africans, showing them the ways of the Lord. [5] As he grew up, he demonstrated much zeal for the supernatural. It was reported that he prophesied about the future, revealed unknown secrets from the past, read signs in the sky, detected witches, and had unusual dreams in which he was taught by holy beings. [6]

His Call

Ositelu received his elementary education from 1913-1919 in Ogere and Ijebu-Ode, in the present Ogun State of Nigeria. After his elementary education, he served in the Anglican Church as a catechist and pupil teacher. He was preparing for admission into St. Andrew's College, Oyo to become a trained teacher when, on the night of May 17, 1925, he had a strange visionary experience which troubled and left him agitated. [7] He saw a large eye as big as the head of a cow “reflecting as a great orbit of the sun.” [8] On enquiry, an old prophet named Samuel Somoye explained these encounters to mean “a call to service.” Prophet Somoye counseled Ositelu on how to

overcome the spiritual warfare through the medium of prayer and fasting. [9]

The authorities of the Anglican Church soon noticed Ositelu's activities and frowned on them. They reprimanded him and strongly advised him to desist from his "hyper-spiritual" practices since they were at variance with those of the church. When Ositelu adamantly refused to comply, he was initially suspended, but later dismissed by the Abeokuta District Council of the Anglican Church. After his dismissal, he worked briefly as a clerk for one of his aunts, but he spent most of the time there in prayer and fasting. [10] By August 31, 1926, Ositelu felt fully convinced, after many visionary experiences, that he had been commissioned to propagate the gospel and needed to warm up for the great assignment ahead. [11] In 1927, he submitted himself to spiritual discipleship under Prophet Somoye. He developed his spiritual gifts, and after two years he emerged as a prophetic preacher and public crusader with the mandate to "give the water of life to the thirsty."

Expansion of His Ministry

Ositelu conducted his first open air revival on June 9, 1929. From that moment, the fame of his open air services spread like wildfire. During his revivals, there were many miracles and acts of healing; people renounced idols, charms, and *Egungun* apparels, which they usually surrendered to him for destruction. People came from the farthest reaches of Nigeria to visit Ogere-Remo, his headquarters, and to witness the marvelous manifestations of the power of God. Before the advent of Christianity, medicine men popularly referred to as *Babalawo* were the homegrown healers and therapist of the time. However, with the advent of *Aladura* movements, prophets like Ositelu claimed to possess and exercise divine powers and the ability to deal with witches, wizards, evil spirits, and ill-wishers who were a major source of fear and anxiety in the society. He inaugurated his Church with only ten members, hoping to entice more to join.

TCLAW's Unique Ministry

Ositelu operated with undaunted spiritual power, majoring in deliverance exercises. As a result, soon other AIC leaders regarded his ministry favorably and his fame spread quickly. Even though Ositelu seems to have recognized the relevance of the African worldview and culture in energizing the Christian faith in his society, he censured the *babalawo*, and expressed his disapproval of idolatry, native charms, and traditional medicine. He practiced faith healing that sometimes required the use of elements such as olive oil, sanctified water, honey, incense, and coconut oil. Like other *Aladura* movements, TCLAW always emphasized the dual efficacy of prayer and fasting. However, TCLAW has unique practices that include the celebration

of a spiritual festival called *Tabieorar*, the use of holy words and names, engagement in spiritual exercises like rolling on the ground, jumping, clapping, and laughing hilariously when giving testimonies, and the tolerance of, and baptism of, polygamists.

Succession in TCLAW

Today, TCLAW is a worldwide organization with 3,800 parishes, 100 dioceses, and twelve provinces spread throughout Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Benin, the United Kingdom, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. TCLAW is also a member of prominent diverse organizations that include the World Council of Churches (WCC), the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC), Global Christian Forum (GCF), and the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN).

Since Josiah Oshitelu died on July 12, 1966, TCLAW has witnessed three successful successions: Emmanuel Adeleke Adejobi (1967-1991); Gabriel Olusegun Oshitelu (1991-1998), and Rufus Okikiola Ositelu (1999-). TCLAW is (1) biblical in pattern, (2) pentecostal in power, (3) evangelical in mission, (4), ecumenical in outlook, (5) prophetic in ministry and (6) social in responsibility. [12] With these enticing tenets and mission, TCLAW will continue to flourish.

Michael Adeleke Ogunewu and Deji Ayegboyin

Notes:

1. He was awarded a Doctorate of Psychology by the National Union of Spiritualists of Nigeria in 1948.
2. R. O. O. Ositelu, *Christianity: Inside Story from an African Perspective* (Shagamu: TCLAW Publications 2016), 492.
3. Deji Ayegboyin and S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches* (Lagos: Greater Heights Publications, 1997), 90.
4. While H. W. Turner quoted 1902 (See *African Independent Church: The Church of the Lord (Aladura)*, Oxford: OUP, 1967), the Church chronicles reinforced by the family declared 1900 as his date of birth. See R. O. O. Ositelu, *Christianity: Inside Story*, 493.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ayegboyin and Ishola, 91.
8. Akin Omoyajowo, N. C. Adiele and M. A. Akinwumi, "Josiah Ositelu (1902-1966)" in J. A. Omoyajowo (ed) *Makers of the Church in Nigeria* (Lagos: CSS Bookshops Ltd (Publishing Units) 1995), 153.
9. Ayegboyin and Ishola, 91.

10. Omoyajowo, Adiele and Akinwumi 156.
11. Ibid, 157.
12. R. Ositelu. *Christianity*, 490.

Oschoffa, Samuel Bilewu
1909 to 1985
Celestial Church of Christ ([Aladura](#))
Nigeria

Daddy Osofa was one of the early converts to Christianity in Porto Novo. In 1909, in answer to his prayers, Mama Alake Iyafa safely delivered a male child. The child was blessed in the Methodist Church and later christened as Samuel Bilewu, a biblical name meaning "gift of God" and an indigenous name derived from a proverb in the Yoruba language *Bi 'le aiye wu ko gbe, sugbon mo mo wipe mo ti toro re lodo Olorun* which means: "If the world pleases the child, let him stay, but I know I've asked God for you."

In 1922, when Oschoffa was thirteen, Daddy Osofa sent him to the mission house to receive basic Christian training. It must have been at the mission house that he adopted the name Joseph and also anglicized the spelling of Oschoffa. He was thereafter called S. B. J. Oschoffa.

At the mission house, Oschoffa could not cope with the strict discipline and refused to participate in the construction of a building. As a result, he was expelled. Disappointed, Daddy Osofa resolved to take his son on as an apprentice carpenter.

On June 15, 1939, Daddy Osofa died peacefully at Porto Novo. The death of his father marked a turning point in Oschoffa's life. He began to take an active part in church activities.

In December 1946, almost seven years after his father's death, Oschoffa abandoned carpentry to take up trading in timber. Even though Oschoffa had not received any formal education, in his short stay at the mission house he had learned to read the Holy Bible. Everywhere he went Oschoffa carried his Bible along.

The Founding of the Celestial Church of Christ

On May 23, 1947, Oschoffa left home for Toffin, a village in the Ganvie area to carry out his usual business. He engaged the services of a paid paddler. He set off in the morning for the forest, specifically to look for mahogany and ebony trees. Suddenly the sky darkened. This spectacle terrified him and he opened his Bible to read some Psalms to strengthen his faith. He realized that this was an eclipse of the sun. While he knelt down to pray for God's guidance, Oschoffa claimed to have heard a strange voice shouting, "Luli, Luli, Luli."

He looked up and, to his great surprise, he saw a white monkey with wings, its mouth wide open, sitting on the branch of a tree. Next to the strange monkey was a multi-colored bird that resembled a peacock. These two creatures are abnormal because in Africa, there are no white monkeys and no monkey has wings. Furthermore, the multi-colored bird had features that shone with light. He looked down and saw a short snake, about thirty

centimeters long. The wonderful scene compelled Oschoffa to retreat to the shore.

On his return, he found the paddler writhing in pain. He immediately prayed to God for quick healing and laid his hands on the paddler. Later the paddler slipped away, leaving Oschoffa stranded, as he could not paddle on his own. Oschoffa said he lost his way in the forest at this point. He was believed to have stayed in the bush for three months, during which he claimed to have eaten only honey. During those three months, he was believed to have seen many revelations about the Kingdom of God.

Oschoffa went to a neighboring village where he healed a young man called Kudiho, who had been ill for a long time. The news of Kudiho's miraculous healing spread like wildfire and Oschoffa's name soon became a household word. In another village, he prayed over a dead man named Guton, who came back to life. The Holy Spirit descended on him and he started prophesying.

On September 29, 1947, while meditating with some well-wishers in his house, Oschoffa claimed to have witnessed a mysterious and divine appearance, where a winged angel bathed in an intense light stood before him. The angel allegedly spoke to Oschoffa in the Egun language and commissioned him to "preach to the world" and perform miraculous works of healing.

The name of the church was believed to have come down from heaven by divine revelation through a certain Alexander Yanga who was one of the early followers of Prophet Oschoffa, healed by him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Celestial Church of Christ grew rapidly after the formal proclamation of the Holy Spirit's orders through Alexander Yanga. Oschoffa was soon proclaimed a prophet by the ever-increasing followers. Apart from being called a prophet of God, Oschoffa was also allowed to use the title of "pastor" even though he had not attended any seminary nor been ordained as such. Thus, the founder of the Celestial Church of Christ became known as Pastor, Founder, Prophet S. B. J. Oschoffa.

Opposition

Oschoffa performed many miracles in which he healed people or raised them from the dead. At Grand-Popo he was said to have stopped the sea from advancing and eroding the land. As his reputation spread, the Celestial Church grew rapidly and many people defected from the existing churches. This created great resentment and opposition to his ministry from these churches, which accused him of using evil powers.

Soon Prophet Oschoffa was antagonized by the French colonial administration. Perhaps at the instigation of the authorities of the orthodox churches, he was accused of inciting government workers to neglect their official duties, especially on Wednesdays and Fridays. Oschoffa had to face

many other tribulations coming from the colonial administration and the mission churches, including unsubstantiated accusations and trumped up charges, as well as problems related to church registration.

Oschoffa in Nigeria

By 1950, the Celestial Church (C.C.C.) had spread from Agange across the entire Toffin district to Gbaji from where it entered into Nigeria through some fishermen who were Celestials.

The Celestial Church of Christ had a relatively small representation in the 1960s in Nigeria. However, the decade 1970-80 witnessed a phenomenal growth in the Celestial Church in Nigeria.

Another factor that helped the spread of the Celestial Church was the Nigerian oil boom of the seventies. Many rich individuals sponsored the establishment of parishes into which shepherds and workers were recruited. The use of the Yoruba language in worship and other liturgical practices of the sect offered tremendous attraction. The situation was further enhanced by the striking similarity between the Yoruba traditional religious practices and the C.C.C. worship and liturgical practices.

The Celestial Church experienced phenomenal growth from 1970 to 1980, and spread to Badagry, Ibadan, Epe, Zaria, Kaduna, Kano, Onitsha, Aba, Owerri, London, New York, and other world capitals – wherever Africans were found.

Oshoffa's Death

The sudden home call of the enigmatic pastor-founder was unexpected. Oschoffa suffered a terrible car accident on September 1, 1985 in which two of his aides died. While he survived the initial crash, he died in the hospital in the early hours of September 10, 1985, as the doctors were preparing to release him.

The mortal remains of the pastor-founder, Pa S. B. J. Oschoffa, were finally laid to rest on Saturday, October 10, 1985, in his mother's hometown, Imeko, the Celestial City, amidst pomp and pageantry, mourning and thanksgiving.

Albert Aduloju Agbaje

This biography is abridged from an article written by Rt. Rev. Dr. Albert Aduloju Agbaje, bishop of Sabongidda-Ora Diocese, as a chapter in the book *Makers of the church in Nigeria*, edited by J. A. Omoyajowo (Lagos, Nigeria: CSS Bookshops Ltd., 1995), pages 169-193.

To read the full article please visit www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/oschoffa_samuelb.html.

**Either Patronage or Partnership in Christian Mission:
Moderator John G. Gatu's Proposal for Moratorium on
Western Missionary Funds and Personnel**

by
Jesse N. K. Mugambi

John Gatu (1925 -)

John S. Pobee's brief entry on John [Gachango] Gatu in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Wm. B. Eerdmans and WCC, 1991) says he was born in Kiambu, Kenya on March 3, 1925. Biographical detail about his early life was not easily accessible until the publication of his recent autobiography, *Fan Into Flame: An Autobiography* (Nairobi: Moran Publishers, December 2016). However, a few salient details will suffice to frame the context of this article on what was arguably his controversial but prescient call for moratorium on Western missionaries and finances on the continent of Africa.

After serving as a sergeant in the colonial army during World War II, Gatu received his initial theological education at St. Paul's United Theological College in Limuru, Kenya (1951–1955). He subsequently studied at New College at the University of Edinburgh, UK (1958), at Pittsburgh Theological College, USA (1963), and at Princeton Theological Seminary, USA (1970–1971). Following his ordination in the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Africa, he soon rose to become the first African general secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) from 1964 to 1979, and then moderator of the Church from 1979 to 1985. Along the way, he served as chairperson of the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK), and was involved extensively with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). An international churchman, Gatu served on the World Council of Churches (WCC) in its Faith and Order Commission between 1961 and 1975. Among his better-known publications are *Joyfully Christian, Truly African* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2006) and a volume of Gikuyu poetry, *He Gatu Nguhe Kanua [Listen to Me, I Tell You All]* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2006).

The two-decade span (1964–1985) of Gatu's church leadership coincided with the most transformative period in the recent history of the African continent. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) had just been formed on May 23, 1963. African nations were struggling to find their bearings in the international arena. Gatu became an exemplary churchman, statesman, and role model in his church, in the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK); in the Kenya Christian Churches Educational Association (CCEA); in the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC); in the World Council of Churches (WCC); in the East African Revival Movement (EARM); in the International Congress for World Evangelization (ICWE); and in the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA).

Gatu's 1971 proposal for a "moratorium" on missionary funds and personnel from Europe and North America to Africa was intended as a means to an end. As general secretary of his Church (PCEA), he recognized that the withdrawal of missionary funds and personnel from Africa would help both the "donors" and the "recipients" to take stock of their past relationship, so that both sides could relate more efficiently and effectively for the good of the Church as a whole.

Although Gatu is best known internationally as the proponent of the moratorium, in Kenya he is famous for the pithy maxim that he proposed for his Church: *Jitegemea* (Self-Reliance). This motto would become a national catchword in Kenya, going well beyond the ecclesiastical domain to encapsulate a national ideal. The national emblem of Kenya contains the motto *Harambee* (Let us work together for a common goal). Perhaps the cultural root of Gatu's moratorium proposal is this motto, which is expressed variously in many African languages, as the core of African wisdom.

As a tangible outcome of his persistent advocacy of *Jitegemea*, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa is today one of the most self-reliant Protestant churches on the continent. In his autobiography, *Fan into Flame*, Gatu narrates his own recollection of the most significant experiences of his life: as a soldier in the King's African Rifles; a staunch Kenyan nationalist; an astute churchman; an ecumenist; an evangelical revivalist; a Pan Africanist; a statesman; a peacemaker; a family head; a cultural reformist, and, above all, a mentor to many people, all over the world. It is a book well worth reading.

Gatu was, and continues to be, one of the most influential and highly respected Kenyan churchmen of his generation, and the *Journal of African Christian Biography* is honored to feature this retrospective analysis of the key role he played in the moratorium debate.

Gatu's Proposal for a Moratorium on Missionary Funding and Personnel

In October 1971, Kenyan Presbyterian pastor, Rev. Dr. John Gatu shocked the audience in his famous address to a conference organized by the Reformed Church of America in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. He was, at that time, the elected general secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.³

³ The earliest missionaries from the Church of Scotland reached Kenya in October 1891. It was not until 1958-1959 that the first Kenyan, John G. Gatu (born March 3, 1925) was sent abroad, to Scotland, for training. It took another five years for him to become the first Kenyan secretary general of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, a post he held for fifteen years (1964-79). He then was elected moderator of the PCEA for six years until retirement (1979-85). During the two decades in the top leadership of his Church, Gatu was exemplary as a reconciler between religious and political leadership, and also as an ecumenist of exceptional influence. It was during his leadership that Nairobi hosted the World Council of Churches (WCC) Fifth Assembly (November 1975); the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (December 1976);

Concisely, Gatu's proposal at the time was long overdue for the withdrawal of North American and European funds and missionaries from the churches they had started and patronized in Africa and elsewhere. Patronage—through disbursement of money and the deployment of personnel—had incapacitated the beneficiary churches, instead of enabling them to stand on their own feet, both ecclesiastically and economically.

While boosting the ego of the benefactors, patronage has the unintended effect of dehumanizing the beneficiaries to the point of desperation. Consequently, this patronage had muffled the voice of the beneficiaries and crippled their capacity to expand their own internal resources, both human and material. This decreased ability was reflected in their insignificant influence in the decision-making organs denominationally and ecumenically—at local, national, regional, continental, and global levels. The purpose of the proposed withdrawal of funds and personnel was so that the “younger churches” could grow to maturity—fend for themselves and cultivate their own identity, integrity, and self-confidence. Only by so doing would they have the boldness to relate to their older denominational “relatives” more equitably.⁴

The moratorium proposal caused a stir across the entire polity spectrum of Christian denominations. Within the ecumenical movement, the moratorium proposal entered the agenda for discussion at all levels. It was one of the issues widely debated at the World Council of Churches' Fifth Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, in November 1975. Earlier, it had already been on the agenda of the Third Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches in Lusaka, Zambia, in May 1974. The Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization had rejected the moratorium proposal during its meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. The Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly in 1976 also rejected the moratorium, and instead claimed that more rather than less patronage was needed. It is important to emphasize that the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly brought together evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal leaders, mainly from North America, whose ecclesiastical influence in Africa was, at that time, marginal in terms of demographic strength. The Roman Catholic Church was categorical in its rejection of the moratorium proposal. Instead, more

and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) Fourth Assembly (August 1981). From 1975 until his retirement he was a member of the WCC Central Committee and for much longer he was a trustee of the AACC. Some of his addresses are published in *Joyfully Christian, Truly African* (Nairobi: Acton, 1985). More details of his unique life are summarized in his autobiography, *Fan into Flame*.

⁴ John G. Gatu, “The Time Has Come,” address to the meeting convened by the Reformed Church of America, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 1971. For a more detailed report of Gatu's address see Marvin D. Hoff, *The Reformed Church in America: Structures for Mission, Issues 14-16*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985, pp. 167ff.

investment was encouraged, especially in Kenya. More than thirty congregations established their headquarters in Nairobi, with retreat centers open for use by non-Catholics at modest charges. The Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa was launched, which later evolved into the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, sponsored by the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern and Central Africa (AMECEA). There were other voices, outside Africa, in both Asia and Latin America.⁵ Among the African ecumenists who supported the proposal was Canon Burgess Carr from Liberia, then general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, based in Nairobi.⁶

One of the most articulate critics of the moratorium proposal was Michael Cassidy, from South Africa, a founder of the Africa Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE).⁷ In his critique titled “The Call to Moratorium: Perspective on an Identity Crisis,” Cassidy referred to a press conference at which Gatu spoke during the International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne, Switzerland, in July 1974, outlining four problems that required attention:

- (1) the uncertain relationship that exists between the sending and receiving churches;
- (2) the need for selfhood and self-reliance of the church that has emerged on the mission field;
- (3) the need for the national church to take the responsibility for mission with its own resources and its own people; and

⁵ Robert Reese in his article titled “John Gatu and the moratorium on missionaries” (*Missiology: An International Review*, Vol 43, Issue 2, 2014) documents a wide range of responses to John Gatu’s proposal, within Africa, and also in Asia, Europe, North America and South America. Reese also compares Gatu with Roland Allen. http://www.edsmither.com/uploads/5/6/4/6/564614/reese_ems_2012.pdf
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0091829613502143>

⁶ Canon Burgess Carr (1936-2012) was AACC general secretary, 1971-77. See his article “The Moratorium: The Search for Self-Reliance and Authenticity,” in *AACC Bulletin*, 1974; also, “The Mission of the Moratorium,” in the *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 64 No. 254, April 1975. For more on this point see Gwinyai Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987).

⁷ Michael Cassidy (born November 30, 1935) in South Africa, founder of Africa Enterprise and the National Initiative for Reconciliation. Commentator on the Christian commentary radio program called “Daywatch,” he was one of the leaders of the historic National Conference of Church Leaders at Rustenburg in 1990. In 1993 he chaired a Consultation on Human Rights and Religious Freedom in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. G.N. Uzoigwe, “European Partition and Conquest of Africa: an Overview,” in *UNESCO History of Africa, Vol. VII*, Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 19-44.

- (4) the problem of institutions on the mission field—those that may or may not be desired by the church, the supervision of such institutions, and resources to sustain them.

Gatu had concluded his press statement with the following recommendation:

The presence of missionaries and money has played a great part in shaping these relationships. (...) Some of us feel a temporary withdrawal of missionaries and personnel will help the two parties—that is, the receiving church to be able to criticize or evaluate what they have been doing in light of the four items I have mentioned, and also the sending churches to be able to evaluate what they have been doing so that we can adapt ourselves honestly to the demands of mission in the 1970s.⁸

In response to Gatu's proposal, Cassidy preferred the status quo—for the church leadership to do and say nothing, lest they lean on either side of the ideological divide—at a time when liberation struggles were raging in southern Africa. Such ideological “neutrality” at that time would amount to support of the status quo and Gatu's view was categorical regarding both liberation as a socio-political necessity, and salvation as a spiritual yearning.

Some churches in Africa rejected the proposal in its entirety. For example, in Ethiopia the leadership of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus maintained that “even with the continued presence of foreign personnel and funds, [the church] can assert its freedom from any and every kind of foreign dominance.”⁹ The moratorium debate filtered into academic discourse, especially at the University of Nairobi during the 1970s where the policy was already in place, to train and recruit African personnel without compromise on the quality of scholarship and institutional management. In his memoirs, the Dutch Catholic missionary, Prof. Joseph G. Donders, hints at this moratorium debate among both Africans and foreigners in academia.¹⁰

Response from Gerald H. Anderson

⁸ Michael Cassidy, “The Call to Moratorium: Perspectives on an Identity Crisis”, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/090-04_265.pdf.

⁹ Bengt Sundkler (1909–1995) and C. Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 1029.

¹⁰ Joseph G. Donders, (1929–2013) “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 96–99.

Gerald H. Anderson, who was then director of the Overseas Mission Study Center (OMSC) in New Haven, Connecticut, USA, was conversant with the goings-on in both ecumenical and evangelical circles. In January 1974 he published an article in the *Christian Century* rhetorically titled: “A Moratorium on Missionaries?”¹¹ Anderson’s article clearly indicated that Gatu’s proposal did not come from a lone voice crying in the wilderness. Rather it reverberated across all the colonized regions—Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania. In Asia, it found resonance in the views of several leaders, among them Emerito P. Nacpil, president of Union Theological Seminary near Manila, Philippines. Nacpil observed that the prevailing relationship between the “older churches” and the “younger churches” (as the distinction indicated) made it impossible for the two categories to relate equitably. Likewise, Paul Verghese, a former associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches who later became principal of an Orthodox theological seminary in India, observed: “Foreign finances, ideas, and personnel still dominate the younger churches and stifle their spontaneous growth.”¹²

In Latin America, Dr. Miguez Bonino, then Dean of Union Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina, proposed: “We cannot for the love of our brethren or for the love of God let anybody or anything stand in the way of our taking on our own shoulders our responsibility. If, in order to do that, we must say to you, our friends, ‘Stay home,’ we will do so because, before God, we have this grave responsibility of our integrity.”¹³

Thus Gatu’s proposal for a moratorium on funds and personnel was timely and relevant in view of prevailing relationships between the “First” and the “Third” worlds, especially during the Cold War, which poised the “Second” world between the “First” and the “Third.” In diplomatic, economic, and missionary circles, these labels were taken for granted and were not open to questioning. Their intended meaning was self-explanatory: the rich and powerful would call the tune, and the rest would have to dance and sing, accordingly, or suffer the consequences of non-compliance. In conformity with this divisive and paternalistic discourse, the inaugural meeting of the Ecumenical Association of Third-World Theologians (EATWOT) was convened in August 1976 at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, bringing together some “Third World Theologians” from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Ironically, the funding for this inaugural conference, and subsequent ones,

¹¹Gerald H. Anderson, (1941-2015) “A Moratorium on Missionaries?” in *Christian Century*, January 1974, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1574>. Gerald H. Anderson was Director of the Overseas Ministries Study Centre (OMSC) 1976-2000.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

was sourced from First World sponsorship, and many of the participants operated in the First World.¹⁴

To exemplify an alternative to missionary patronage and condescension, Gatu launched a strategy for self-reliance in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Despite skepticism on the part of some church leaders both within and outside his denomination, Gatu persisted, and the headquarters of his Church was built, within a short time, with funds raised locally. In Kenya the decade of the 1970s was imbued with the euphoria of nationalistic self-consciousness, following the achievement of national sovereignty in 1963 after a decade of extreme colonial repression. Kenya, perhaps more than any other nation in Tropical Africa, was poised for such a proposal as the one Gatu presented in Milwaukee. The funds for the construction of the PCEA headquarters were raised through public appeals in the news media. Many people contributed, confirming that indeed the time had come for Africa to rely on its own resources to chart its own destiny—without denigrating the contributions from elsewhere, if offered in good faith.

Reflections from Jonathan Bonk

Professor Jonathan Bonk published his book *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem* in 1991, two decades after Gatu's moratorium proposal.¹⁵ In the book, Bonk lucidly illustrated ways and means by which funds and personnel from the imperial metropolises have hampered the blossoming of Christianity in former colonies. In a revised edition of the book published in 2006, Bonk reiterated his earlier observations, and expressed concern that the situation was deteriorating rather than improving. This deterioration was exacerbated by the professionalization of aid agencies, and the incorporation of mission agencies into the foreign aid agenda of the so-called developed countries.

From the perspective of the target populations, it is impossible to distinguish between missionaries and other expatriates deployed from one European or North American country into a country in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean or the Pacific. Broadly, missionaries and their colleagues in secular "aid agencies" belong to the same class, the same culture, the same race, and the same mission. Those who serve in church-related organizations are a small part of a bigger team, in one institutional structure. The discourse about "aid" is that structure is determined more by the foreign policy of the source government, than by the Gospel. The *process*

¹⁴ Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, editors, *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the underside of history: papers from the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians*, Dar es Salaam, August 5-12, 1976, Hardcover – 1978.

¹⁵ Jonathan Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991. Bonk was the Executive Director of OMSC from 2000-2013.

of secularization has become subservient to the ideology of secularism. Consequently, Western Christianity has become increasingly alienated from African Christianity.¹⁶ Introducing the second edition of his book *Missions and Money*, Bonk reiterates the necessity for a review of relations between the churches of Europe and North America on the one hand, and those of the rest of the world, on the other.

Bonk's commentary on the Western missionary enterprise in its relationship with the target populations in Africa and elsewhere, resonates with that of Gatu in his autobiography, *Fan Into Flame*. Gatu refers to an apt description of Gikuyuland by Marion Scott Stevenson— one of the early missionary educators under the Scotland Mission, who described the land that the British occupied in Central Kenya as the best on earth. She wrote, in the Gikuyu language: “God has bestowed upon the Gikuyu a good land that does not lack food, water or pasture. Therefore, the Gikuyu ought to thank God, because He has been very generous to them.” Reflecting on the colonial injustice of the British occupation of the land, Gatu writes:

Due to the agreeable climate and fertile soil in the Gikuyu highlands, the early Europeans who came into Kenya chose to settle in the Gikuyu region. When the colonialists began to take over the area they named it, together with other parts of Kenya that they occupied, the “White Highlands” and introduced legislation to maintain it for the exclusive use of white settlers as well as to legitimize its alienation from the indigenous owners, the Africans . . . Unfortunately, the blessings bestowed on the Gikuyu attracted, overwhelmingly, the European greed that led to the subsequent occupation of the land and the eviction of the Gikuyu from the same. This triggered protests over land policies and politics in Central Kenya, from 1892 to the end of World War II. Resistance to European occupation of these lands culminated in the Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s, which saw the region placed under a state of emergency in 1952. This led to the arrest and incarceration of many prominent African leaders and thousands of ordinary people. I became increasingly aware of these political and social injustices in my early teenage years.¹⁷

¹⁶ For a critique of church agencies as aid organizations, see Dan Heist and Ram A, Cnaan, “Faith-Based International Development Work: A Review,” in *Religions*, Vol. 7 Issue 19, MDPI, 2016, file:///Users/mugambi/Downloads/religions-07-00019.pdf

¹⁷ John G. Gatu, *Fan into Flame: An Autobiography* (Nairobi: Moran, 2017), 2-3.

This close collaboration between the colonial administrators, the settlers, and the missionaries remains the most glaring indictment of the Christian missionary enterprise in Africa and elsewhere. What meaning did the missionaries attach to such biblical concepts as St. Paul's trilogy of "faith, hope, and love"? This question remains pertinent in the twenty-first century. Gatu's proposal for a moratorium on mission funds and personnel had its background in the colonial and post-colonial history of Kenya. Quite clearly, there was hardly any evident interest on the part of the benefactors—in both missionary and secular circles—to change the dynamics of relationship between the European and North American "benefactors" on the one hand, and on the other, the African "beneficiaries." Gatu wanted a radical change of relationship, from patronage to genuine partnership. Bonk's book *Missions and Money Revisited* is not about economic theory, but about the challenge of living equitably in contexts of dire economic deprivation and destitution.

Reconstructive Responses by African Churches

Within four decades of Gatu's challenging address in Milwaukee in October 1971, some African churches and church-related organizations implemented strategies for self-reliance with remarkable and commendable success. The following are examples: a) the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, Northern Diocese; b) the Anglican Church of Kenya; c) the Methodist Church of Kenya; d) the Presbyterian Church of Kenya; and e) the Anglican Church of Uganda. Dennis Tongoi, in the research he conducted for a doctoral thesis in missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA), has documented some initiatives in these churches. One of his findings is that Gatu's moratorium proposal was practicable and cost-effective. The African churches and church-related organizations that emulated Gatu's proposal are now thriving, while those that continued their dependence on foreign personnel and funding have floundered.¹⁸ In a similar vein, Bright Mawudor, as an accounting consultant, wrote a doctoral thesis at the Open University of Tanzania, arriving at the conclusion that those church-related organizations that rely on their own internal resources tend to thrive, while those dependent on donations from abroad suffer inevitable decline.¹⁹

Demographic statistics on Christianity in Europe and North America indicate a decline in church membership, consistent with the aging population, a rise in secularism, and an emphasis on materialistic lifestyles. Nominal Christianity has become the most dominant religion in Tropical

¹⁸ Dennis O. Tongoi, "Business as Mission and Mission as Business: Case Studies of Financially Sustainable Christian Mission Ventures with a Focus on Anglican Dioceses in East Africa," D. Th. Thesis, University of South Africa, 2017.

¹⁹ Bright Mawudor, "Financial Sustainability of Church Related Organizations: An Empirical Study On Kenya," Ph.D. Thesis, Open University of Tanzania, 2014.

Africa, with the most diverse denominational profile worldwide. Most of the denominations are exports from Europe and North America. In protest against, or emulation of, Western denominational plurality, the increase in the number of African Instituted Churches is apparently limitless. In 1968 David B. Barrett published his study of this phenomenon using the label “Schism and Renewal” to describe African Church independency.²⁰ Allan Anderson followed up with more research, which extended the scope to include Pentecostal and Charismatic movements introduced from North America and Europe, then contextualized into characteristically African initiatives. This trend continues, as evidence of African insistence on expressing Christian religiosity in their respective contexts, and according to their own ways and means.²¹

The paternalism evident in the conduct of missionary ventures from Europe and North America to Africa has paid negative dividends. African Christianity is increasingly fragmented and competitive, often very confrontational. These manifestations of competition, fragmentation and confrontation are much more a liability than an asset against proclamation of the Gospel. They are contributions toward social disintegration rather than social cohesion. The prayer of Jesus “that all may be one” is honored more in breach than compliance. The missionary ventures from Europe and North America, as an integral part of the cultural and religious invasions of Africa, have been scandalous, and there seems to be no end of them in sight. Patronage continues unabated, while the partnership that Gatu hoped for remains an aspiration rather than a reality.

St. Paul challenges Christians to avoid the temptation of being conformed to the norms of this world, and instead, through the renewal of their minds, to become agents of transformation (Romans 12:1-2). In the African context, such transformation is possible only through contextually appropriate and relevant education and training of local personnel, for all aspects of church ministry. Dickson Nkonge Kagema, in his research on the Anglican Church of Kenya with reference to this concern, found that although this church has been growing numerically, its personnel could not match the growth.²² Research in other denominations would confirm the same shortcoming. The temptation to send African personnel for training abroad is a shortcut likely to cause more damage than repair. Contextualized

²⁰ David B. Barrett, (1927-2011) *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Oxford University Press, 1968).

²¹ Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ., Africa World Press, 2001).

²² Dickson Nkonge Kagema, “Leadership Training for Mission in the Anglican Church of Kenya,” Ph.D. Thesis, UNISA, 2010.

local training is, in the long term, more cost-effective and more productive, with lower risk of patronage, and more potential for partnership.

Conclusion

The use, abuse, and misuse of Christianity as a tool for conquest is, apparently, normative in history. Africa is no exception. Confirmation of this fact is evident in the scramble and partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference, 1884-1885. Its outcome was the fragmentation of African societies across colonial borders and across ideologies; across linguistic territories separated by their primary language—English, French, Portuguese, German, Spanish, Afrikaans, Arabic; across denominations—Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, etc. In response to, and in addition to, this confusion, African converts chose to form their own denominations. Consequently, Africa has the largest number of independent churches anywhere in the world, compared with any other period in history. What a mess!²³

The teachings of Christianity contain the virtues, values, norms, and principles that condemn injustice, while promoting the ideals of faith, hope, and love. Africa in the twentieth century has been the scene of competition between empires, at the expense of the colonized peoples and the natural resources on their lands. Christian missions in Africa, as institutions, have been an integral part of this invasion. At the same time, there have been individuals, some categorized as missionaries and others in other capacities, who remained faithful to the ideal of the Gospel. These exceptional personalities set examples emulated by African converts. Africans appreciated their witness to the heart of the Gospel. It is from these exceptions that the Christian faith has blossomed in Africa. Every African Christian in Gatu's generation will remember such exceptional missionaries. The same situation prevails today. Christian mission in Tropical Africa is no longer about winning converts because Christianity has, in fact, already permeated most areas, both rural and urban. Yet missionaries continue to come, most of them located in the same areas where Christianity is already established and thriving. This is the concern that underlies Gatu's call for a moratorium on sending missionary funds and personnel abroad. It remains valid, decades after Gatu first expressed it.

Immigration restrictions against African travel to Europe and North America, without reciprocal restrictions in Africa, reduce the principle of "Partnership in Mission" to a mockery of both "Partnership" and "Mission." Could the numerical decline of Christianity in Europe and North America not justify the re-evangelization of Europe and North America by

²³ G.N. Uzoigwe, "European Partition and Conquest of Africa: an Overview, in *UNESCO History of Africa, Vol. VII* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 19-44

African Christians, as a matter of necessity? If the answer is positive, what institutional arrangements would facilitate it? What immigration exemptions would be needed, even if Africans could afford such a re-evangelization effort? On the other hand, if the answer is negative, what justification remains for the continued flow of missionaries to Africa, a continent that is increasingly becoming more Christian than Europe and North America?

The apparent impossibility of a reverse flow of missionary funds and personnel from Africa to Europe and North America, at the present time, is indicative of the insight that the end of patronage, and the advent of partnership, is yet to come. The funding of missionary agencies and other aid programs does not come from surplus capital. It is budgeted as a matter of necessity in foreign policy. If similar budgeting were to be done by an African nation, would African missionaries be welcome in Europe and North America? The challenge posed by John Gatu in 1971 will remain until patronage gives way to partnership.

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Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

Bediako, Kwame. **Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa (Regnum Studies in Mission)**. 2011. \$65.00. [Amazon](#). ISBN:978-1610974400

“Kwame Bediako examines the question of Christian identity in the context of the Greco-Roman culture of the early Roman Empire. He then addresses the modern African predicament of quests for identity and integration. *Theology and Identity* was one of the finalists for the 1992 Harper Collins Religious Book Award.” (from back of book, [Amazon](#))

Britt, Samuel Irving. **The Children of Salvation: Ritual Struggle in a Liberian Aladura Church (Studies in Comparative Religion)**. 2012. \$25.00. [Amazon](#). ISBN: 978-1611171020

“Founded in West Nigeria in the early twentieth century, the Aladura Church combines traditional Christian liturgy, a theology of the Spirit, creative ritual strategies and social practices, and has expanded to nearly one million adherents worldwide. Aladura faith practices emphasize the role of the prophet-healer who embodies virtue (spiritual power) and guides the faithful along a journey of ritual struggle toward salvation. Through the study of St. Peter's United Church of the Lord, an Aladura community in the Republic of Liberia, Samuel Irving Britt explores the relationship between worldview and ritual action in the church as well as the influence of Nigerian and Liberian traditions in shaping its character. This study provides the first in-depth study of an African Initiated Church in Liberia.

Through the lens of theology, ethnography, and ritual studies, Britt helps us understand the church's role in Liberia and its diaspora communities throughout the world. Looking first at the various healing rituals among the Aladura churches, he investigates the notion of the ritual struggle and its relationship to the events and trends of the past thirty years. By acknowledging the effect of ritual struggle on St. Peter's, Britt explains the importance of religious life in understanding the Liberian civil war, occult cosmologies, new Liberian and Aladura diasporas, and the global surfacing of the Pentecostal mission. *The Children of Salvation* offers an understanding of Liberian spirituality, the Aladura's ritual struggle in the cultural order, and the ever-present hope for restoration in a war-torn community.” ([Amazon](#))

Postcolonial Mission: Power and Partnership in World Christianity. Edited by Desmond van der Water 2011. \$24.95. [Amazon](#). ISBN: 978-1935946007

“Christian mission is much more than a sermon from the church addressed to the world. This book shows that mission must recognize that God is present in the world, calling all of God's people to witness to and participate in God's reconciliation, healing, and transformation of all parts of life. This is holistic mission for a postmodern world. Postcolonial Mission includes chapters from Steve de Gruchy, Roderick Hewitt, Paul Isaak, Namsoon Kang, Jooseop Keum, Sam Kobia, Marjorie Lewis, Rogate Mshana, Sarojini Nadar, Isabel Apawo Phiri, and Des van der Water.” ([Amazon](#))

Smith, R. Drew. **Freedom's Distant Shores: American Protestants and Post-Colonial Alliances with Africa.** 2006. \$34.95. [Amazon](#). ISBN: 978-1932792379

“This volume examines relations between U.S. Protestants and Africa since the end of colonial rule. It draws attention to shifting ecclesiastical and socio-political priorities, especially the decreased momentum of social justice advocacy and the growing missionary influence of churches emphasizing spiritual revival and personal prosperity. The book provides a thought-provoking assessment of U.S. Protestant involvements with Africa, and it proposes forms of engagement that build upon ecclesiastical dynamism within American and African contexts.” ([Amazon](#))

Open Access: Theses

Baiyewu, Timothy Olu Wilson. **The Transformation of Aladura Christianity in Nigeria.** Doctoral Thesis. 2014. University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS). <https://epub.uni-bayreuth.de/id/eprint/2588>

Abstract: The study examines the transformation of Aladura Christianity in Nigeria, focusing on three major strands of Aladura churches, namely Cherubim and Seraphim, the Church of the Lord Aladura, and the Celestial Church of Christ in three major cities of Lagos, Ibadan, and Jos. In Nigeria, there are many different religious groups that compete for members and relevance. Among the different religious groups, the new Pentecostal churches' use of media technologies makes them more visible everywhere, giving the impression that the Aladura Christianity no longer exists.

The study used interviews, questionnaires, observation, and historical documents to obtain relevant empirical and historical data. The data reveals that the diverse religious groups in Nigeria and the competition between them, as well as migration and globalization push Aladura churches to transform themselves. The Aladura churches compete for members and relevance across inter and intra religious boundaries. To remain widely accepted and relevant, the churches have introduced changes into their respective organizational structure that integrate zealous street preaching, healing rituals, media technologies, social services, and they have repackaged spiritual commodities in their evangelism strategy. The churches deploy

these strategies to achieve success in church administration, to compete successfully with other religious groups, and to meet the spiritual and secular needs of members and visitors.

In spite of the influence of migration and globalization, Yoruba religious and cultural elements have persisted in the belief and practice of Aladura churches in Yoruba and non-Yoruba speaking areas where Aladura churches are found. Also, church membership is largely dominated by the Yoruba people from southwestern Nigeria. The study also reveals that the churches are both conservative and largely innovative in their activities, drawing and sustaining their population from marriage and procreation, and conversion that is largely from other Christian churches, while few members are drawn from traditional religion and Islam. The continued existence and success of Aladura churches are linked to their function in addressing the political, economic, and social inadequacies reflected in the lives of their clients and the larger society.

Komolafe, Festus. **Roman Catholic and Aladura Baptismal Doctrines: A Comparative Study in the Nigerian Context.** Masters Thesis. 2016. University of Toronto, School of Theology.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1807/75531>

Abstract: Baptism is an integral part of Christianity. Most Christian denominations accept and practice water baptism invoking the Trinity, as an initiation into the life of Christ and the church. Although both the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and Aladura Churches (AC) practice water baptism with a scripture-based Trinitarian formula, there are differences in understanding and theology. This leads to problems, such as re-baptism on the part of the AC and conditional baptism by the RCC.

Thus, this thesis researches and documents each church's sacramental theology, doctrine, and practice and compares the two, so as to use the resulting conclusion of compatibility as a basis for constructive dialogue between the AC and the RCC in Nigeria. Since unity does not necessitate uniformity, if properly handled and open-heartedly embraced, such dialogue could lead to better mutual understanding of each other's doctrine and theology and the promotion of ecumenical unity reaching back to John 17:20–21.

Makofane, Karabo Mpeane. **The Moratorium Debate in Christian Mission and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.** MA Thesis, Theology. 2009. UNISA. <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/2972>

Abstract: This study presents the moratorium debate as a phenomenon of its own time. The challenges the moratorium debate poses to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Southern African/Central Diocese come under the spotlight. The AICs have taken the lead in attempting to live up to the “four self” principle, which is self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating and self-theologizing, and areas which ELCSA/CD can learn

from the AICs are highlighted. Finally, the study explores issues of mutuality and interdependence, and a few guidelines are proposed for ELCSA/CD.

Xapile, Spiwo Patrick. **Unity Negotiations between the Bantu Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (1959-1971)**. MA Thesis, Religious Studies. 1994. University of Cape Town. <http://hdl.handle.net/11427/13867>

Abstract: Talks about church unity evoke differing responses, with people responding both positively and negatively. These responses stem from memories of the past, realities of the present, and expectations of the future. Many believe that history is opening a door to a new ecclesiastical era. A door of opportunity, an opportunity to address the divisions that exist within the Church of Jesus Christ. But are churches prepared to forget their divided past, to strive to find new expressions of fellowship, of witness, of communion with one another as the new South Africa promises to open the political door a little wider? In the attempt to wrestle with the unity negotiations between the Bantu Presbyterian Church (renamed Reformed Presbyterian Church of South Africa in 1979) and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, this paper will look at the missed opportunities. South African history, bitter as it has been, provided the churches with opportunities to work towards unity. But these were not grasped. The Bantu Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa confess the same faith with no doctrinal differences. One would have hoped that it would have been less problematic to bring them together than two denominations from different confessional backgrounds. But the history of colonization and of African resistance to it has largely shaped attitudes against proposals for a united church. European missionaries were seen by many Africans as identical with the colonial powers, and the gospel was regarded as a weapon to disarm them.

In a brief historical discussion of missionary expansion, I will trace the origins of the two churches, the Bantu Presbyterian Church with a history of African control, and, in fact, a near total absence of whites, and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa which has always been white dominated. This will highlight the historical reasons that led to conservative attitudes grounded in racial prejudice, the main stumbling block for organic unity. No one who is aware of the level of race relations in South Africa since 1948 can avoid asking questions on how the two churches even came to dream of such a union between white and African Christians.

In this thesis it will be argued that the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches contributed much to challenging these two churches to talk about unity. Through their participation in conferences and programs of the ecumenical movement, problems resulting from a divided witness became more glaring. The need to address these problems became an urgent matter. The clear witness of the World Council of Churches, its uncompromising challenge to social, economic, and political structures of

injustice shaped the agenda for the General Assemblies of both the Bantu Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa.

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Research Focus: African Christianity

Since the 1930s, starting with Professor Basil J. Matthews, African Christianity has been a core research commitment of the mission faculty in the Boston University School of Theology. This interest is supported by the historical connection between civil rights activism and Africa missions among alumni, and the renowned African Studies Library and African Studies Center of Boston University. Current research interests among Center faculty, visiting researchers, and students include African Christian biography, African mission history, environmentalism, and indigenous Christian movements in southern Africa. The executive office of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* is housed in the Center, and the Shona religion project showcases the photography of M.L. Daneel on African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe.



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